DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 376 CE 075 846

AUTHOR	Foster, Pablo; Howard, Ursula; Reisenberger, Anna
TITLE	A Sense of Achievement: Outcomes of Adult Learning.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Development Agency, London (England).
ISSN	ISSN-1361-9977
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	56p.; A product of the Quality in Learning and Information Technology (QUILT) Program.
AVAILABLE FROM	Further Education Development Agency, Publications Dept., Mendip Centre, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG, England, United Kingdom (7.50 British pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
JOURNAL CIT	FE Matters; v2 n3 1997
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Attitude Change; Check Lists; *Data Collection; Educational Attitudes; Foreign Countries; *Lifelong Learning; Models; *Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; Records (Forms); *Student Certification; Student Educational Objectives
IDENTIFIERS	National Vocational Qualifications (England); *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This report, which is an outgrowth of the Further Education Development Agency's (FEDA's) Learning Outcomes study, explores ways of identifying, recording, and valuing adult learners' goals and achievements in learning opportunities that are not designed to lead to qualifications. The following topics are discussed in the report's six chapters: the diverse and complex reasons for learning and increasing recognition of the inadequacy of existing procedures for formally assessing and accrediting education in the United Kingdom; the context, background, and approach of the FEDA study; current thinking regarding learning outcomes (the National Vocational Qualifications outcomes model, open college networks and the credit framework, and the issues of accreditation for organizations that maintain a broader mission of adult learning); practical application of learning outcomes in five case studies; practical frameworks for developing learning outcomes strategies; and movement toward a culture of lifelong learning. Appended are the following: specification of the Further Education Funding Council's and local authorities' duties regarding provision of lifelong learning opportunities; overview of activities conducted to investigate different conceptions of learning outcomes and related issues; membership of the FEDA colloquium and consultative group; FEDA specification of learning outcomes; and sample forms. The bibliography lists 20 references. (MN)

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ED 416 376

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning

Pablo Foster, Ursula Howard and Anna Reisenberger

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widening participation

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning

Pablo Foster, Ursula Howard and Anna Reisenberger

FE matters

Published by the **Further Education Development Agency** (FEDA), Dumbarton House,
68 Oxford Street, London W1N 0DA
Tel: [0171] 436 0020 Fax: [0171] 436 0349

Feedback and orders should be directed to:
Publications Department, FEDA,
Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7RG
Tel: [01761] 462 503
Fax: [01761] 463 140 (Publications Department)

Registered charity no: 1044145

Editor: **Lorraine Mullaney**

Designer: **Mike Pope**

Printed by: **Blackmore Limited, Shaftesbury, Dorset**

Cover photograph: **Clarendon College, Nottingham: International Students at The Language Centre**

ISSN: 1361-9977

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Acknowledgments

FEDA would like to acknowledge various papers and comments received during the preparation of this paper, in particular contributions from:

Membership of FEDA colloquium and consultative group

- Maureen Banbury, HMI Inspectorate
- Sue Cara, Norfolk Adult Education Service (now NIACE)
- Carolyn Daines, WEA Eastern Region
- Joyce Deere, Hillcroft College
- Mel Doyle, WEA National Officer
- Pablo Foster, FEDA
- Robert Fryer, Northern College
- Ursula Howard, FEDA
- Olga Janssen, Mary Ward Centre
- Caroline Mager, FEDA
- Evelyn Murray, Working Men's College
- Joan O'Hagan, Fircroft College
- Christopher Parkin, FEDA
- Anna Reisenberger, FEDA
- Gary Smith, Northern College
- Sheila Stanley, Hillcroft College
- Merillie Vaughan Huxley, Senior Inspector, FEFC
- Ansel Wong, Morley College
- Stephen Yeo, Ruskin College

Discussions with FEDA colleagues are gratefully acknowledged by the authors, in particular with Christopher Parkin and Caroline Mager.

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Foreword

I welcome this report as a significant contribution to the way we need to think about learning opportunities as we work towards a culture of lifelong learning. Not all learning needs to lead to qualifications. We also need to give value and validity to learning which is more informal and open-ended and in which learners and teachers can assess together the outcomes of learning and give learners recognition of their achievements.

We are living through an optimistic, exciting time – but also a challenging one. Lifelong learning is a priority for the government to widen participation, involve the many, not the few and to work to eradicate the deep-seated inequalities which have dogged our society and hampered our economic prospects.

We must start with the learners and potential learners. We must respond to what they want and need to learn and recognise each step people take as they develop a sense of themselves as learners.

This work should be developed further. I hope FEDA and other partners in Lifelong Learning will now take the agenda forward and explore how we can value and recognise all learning as mainstream, not marginal so that a Learning Society becomes a reality.

Bob Fryer
Principal, Northern College

1 Introduction

I decided to change the direction I was headed in, i.e. downhill fast. The way I felt able to change direction was by turning my hobby into a living. My hobby is computing. I'm actually quite good at design and problem solving on computers, but I have nothing on paper to prove it. So the answer I came up with was go back to school and get something (anything) on paper.

Bob Smith, Trowbridge, Wilts

Thanks to . . . an excellent tutor . . . and the friendly support of my fellow-students I successfully completed an English course at my local community college. I am proud of my achievement and I intend to go on to pursue all my ambitions.

Hayley Morris, Crawley, West Sussex

I began a course at Park Lane College. In 1996 I am starting an Access course and I hope to go to Leeds University in 1997 to do environmental studies. At the moment, my life is wonderful; I have my confidence and self-esteem and feel I can achieve anything.

Julie Smithson, Wakefield

Coare and Thomson (eds.) 1996

This report aims to contribute to the development of good practice in recognising learners' goals and achievements for learning which is not designed to lead to qualifications. It is about the accreditation of learning in its widest sense: finding ways of identifying, recording and valuing learning which start with learners' needs. It is not about accreditation as part of the framework of formal qualifications. Adults need learning opportunities in a wide variety of ways at different times for different purposes, which do not fall along binary divides between whether that learning leads to a formal qualification or not. What links all modes of adult learning, however, and justifies their place in the system of provision is the need for learners to take away knowledge and a recognition of their own achievements, so that these can be carried forward to support them in making progress and meeting challenges throughout their lives.

Adults may want new skills for job opportunities or personal development. For many people learning is a part of a way of life – indeed it is a key element of our culture. Although the pleasure and personal satisfaction of learning is well documented, this is far from a self-indulgent or purely recreational pursuit for 'which individuals alone should shoulder the costs' (Sargant *et al*, 1997). Learning is increasingly central to economic productivity in the information and communications age. In a world in which the means of livelihood will be volatile and demand constant change, learning will be the thread of continuity running through life. And too many people, especially those without qualifications or those who feel alienated from education, do not participate at all in the learning opportunities which are available. Education systems and providers therefore need to find imaginative and diverse ways of encouraging learning, and flexible forms of recognising and recording it. An inclusive and flexible approach fits entirely with predicted developments in the workplace, where learning how to learn and the ability to adapt to constant change will be more essential to success than qualifications gained by the age of 21. Recurrent learning will be needed by everybody. This will also be true for those needing technological skills, those striving to create a sustainable environment or those learning the skills of caring for an ailing parent. We have to prepare for a world where effective learning will be at a premium.

The learning outcomes described in this report can be built into a framework of recognising learning achieved, part of a system of building blocks which includes formally accredited learning, the national framework of qualifications and more formal accreditation systems. A credit-based system could encompass all learning (Tait, 1997). A system of building blocks or scaffolding could become an even more helpful concept in the 21st century than the more linear 'ladders' of progression which have helped providers to shape better opportunities for learners in recent decades.

The reasons for learning are diverse and complex. Learners do not always, or even mostly, want or need qualifications or formal assessment to achieve their goals or to give value to their achievements. Many adult learners already have qualifications (Tuckett and Sargant, 1996). However, adults

without qualifications may also want or need to learn a specific skill for a known purpose, or wish to move at their own pace without the pressure of formal assessment at too early a stage. The sense of achievement which successful learning offers can come from a variety of sources, perhaps a particular piece of work, or the activity which the learning enables. This is as true for a specific job-related skill as it is for history or home decorating.

Adults often prefer to learn in short bursts, or 'learning episodes'. They have multiple responsibilities around which they want to fit their learning. Learning opportunities need to be flexible with records of learning achieved which will be widely recognised and valued and which learners can carry forward and use for a variety of purposes: further study, job search, etc. New technologies offer almost limitless potential for enabling the carrying forward of learning outcomes. Summative outcomes or whole portfolios can be captured and carried by both learners and institutions. With careful design the development of student tracking and other systems can provide a learner-centred approach to the ownership of the outcomes of lifelong learning.

There is growing recognition by providers, funding bodies and inspection agencies that formally assessed and accredited education and the national qualifications framework are not appropriate or sufficient for all adults. The system is not currently flexible enough to support strategies to attract excluded or underparticipating groups of people. Lifelong learning, national targets for training and education (NTETs) and a learning society can only be realised if a wider range of strategies and opportunities for learning are developed and supported. We need both traditional and new, flexible forms of learning to offer the breadth and variety of outcomes required. New approaches to the design and method of describing learning outcomes are both necessary and realistic if they are valued and recognised at a national level and eligible for public funding. Educational development will support all adults, the main income generators and key activists in enabling families, communities and society to function well. It is a means to meet the challenges which successive governments have identified: national competitiveness, skill shortages, long-term unemployment, the alienation and exclusion of many young people, lack of social cohesion and human wastage.

With learners' interests and perspectives in mind, this report focuses on what providers can do – and are already developing – to support learning, and recognise achievement.

The FEDA 'Learning Outcomes' study explored some of the ways providers of adult learning have collected evidence which shows that learning satisfies, changes people, opens up opportunities, gets jobs and generates income, without necessarily qualifying for supporting funds. With political support, adult education could contribute to widening participation throughout adulthood.

Chapter 2 examines the context, background and approach taken for this study. In particular it builds on work undertaken by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and designated institutions to identify the learning outcomes of non-accredited provision.

Chapter 3 examines how thinking on learning outcomes has developed by outlining three important contributions to the debate:

- the model espoused by Gilbert Jessup, radical in its concept but later constrained by the demands of assessing outcomes for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)
- the role played by Open College Networks and the development of a national Credit Framework in raising the profile of adult learning outside the 'national' qualifications framework
- the issues of accreditation for organisations which maintain a broader mission of adult learning.

Chapter 4 focuses on the practical application of learning outcomes. The case studies exemplify the use of a learning outcomes strategy to improve quality, the ongoing recording of learning outcomes through records of achievement, and the wide range of outcomes of non-vocational courses, both relating to economic benefits and social and personal benefits, including unintended outcomes.

Chapter 5 offers perspectives on recording learning outcomes from the viewpoint of the provider and learner. Issues for organisations introducing a learning outcomes strategy are identified in a checklist. The need to gather both process and final outcomes and to avoid over-burdensome procedures is stressed. This section also provides a framework for learners to separate the outcomes and benefits of a learning opportunity from the reflection on the learning experience itself. A set of minimum prerequisites for adult learning opportunities is used as the basis for an adaptable draft tool for recording learning outcomes. The essential feature is that the student and tutor must be allowed to describe learning outcomes in their own words, and the provider or funder must apply the detailed analysis.

Chapter 6 argues that a diverse range of learning opportunities and funding streams are needed to carry forward the lifelong learning agenda. Evidence from both the Employment Department's research into Lifetime Learning, and from the OFSTED inspection reports on adult education demonstrate the contribution of adult education to lifelong learning and argue for a recognition of the broad range of process outcomes which adult education provides.

In this report the term *tutor*, commonly used in adult learning, has been used rather than *teacher* or *lecturer*.

2 The origins of the FEDA study

FEDA's investigation into adults' learning outcomes grew out of action taken in 1993 by the London District of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the Working Men's College (WMC), a London college with 'designated' funding status. Both organisations received funding for their general adult education work (over two-thirds of total provision) and for their accredited work. In the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC) terms, they were funded for their non-Schedule 2 (NS2) and for their Schedule 2 (S2) provision.

However, in 1993 there was anxiety that a change in FEFC's funding for the designated institutions (the City Literary Institute, Morley College, Mary Ward Centre and the Working Men's College) and for the WEA nationally might 'penalise those courses which did not have measurable and accredited outcomes'.

Following an inaugural seminar in 1993 on 'Assessing outcomes in adult education' the participating institutions agreed to devise surveys and to pool experience gained. There was shared recognition that:

- outcomes were difficult to define in terms appropriate to all parties
- administrative processes had to be manageable and affordable
- course aims and objectives might have to be the starting point for determining easily measurable outcomes.

Progress was made by working with tutors to improve course writing skills in ways that would clarify the *intended* outcomes of any course, before moving on to involve students in assessing how successfully course intentions had been realised, and whether any other, unintended outcomes had also been realised or experienced. Each organisation accordingly developed its own instruments and procedures, reflecting its values, its stage of adaptation to FEFC requirements, and its available levels of teaching and administrative support.

A report was commissioned by the FEFC from Dick Booth and John Fairhurst on the designated colleges: 'Review of Future Funding Arrangements for Growth in non-Schedule 2 Provision' (March 1995). It noted:

> *the work funded by the non-Schedule 2 allocation lacks any agreed framework for its measurement. Consequently it is not easily amenable to external scrutiny and this impedes its accountability. We recommend that the colleges be required to develop and implement a framework which specifies the learning outcomes for non-Schedule 2 work.*

The Council recognised that the 'development of a framework for the learning outcomes of non-Schedule 2 provision was also of interest to external institutions' and this was drawn to FEDA's attention.

The original institutions were interested in opening up the research and invited FEDA to take some of the work forward by disseminating their experience. If they had found ways of gathering evidence of achievement for their own non-accredited provision, perhaps all providers of liberal adult education could do the same. Further work might also confirm that they were 'on the right track' in tackling one of the paradoxes of traditional adult education:

> *Adult education has often regarded its lack of certification as a benefit and attraction for adult learners. It permits greater flexibility and genuine negotiation of the curriculum, and is less daunting for many people whose experience in certificated work at school has diminished their confidence in their ability to study successfully. However, it is difficult to claim that the non-certificated education of adults is at least as valuable as examined courses, if we are unable to identify what is learned in the process . . . unplanned benefits, such as 'social contacts' or 'a friendly atmosphere' or 'increased confidence' are important but probably immeasurable.*
>
> *Evelyn Murray*
> *Principal, Working Men's College*

The aims for this FEDA project, *identifying and valuing learning outcomes for adult learners*, therefore build on the learning achieved by the

original institutions who opened up this important issue:

- to identify learning outcomes valued by adults at different stages
- to survey good practice in identifying and recording learning outcomes for the benefit of individuals and learning providers
- to offer guidelines for providers of good practice
- to identify and draw attention to the range of outcomes including economic, personal development, and their benefits at all societal levels
- to begin enhancing the importance, value and credibility of achievements in this sector (i.e. non-accredited work in general adult education)
- to devise a framework for recording the outcomes of non-accredited learning which is of value to learners and learning organisations.

A colloquium was convened in January 1996 to tap into the experience of the prime movers in this area (see Appendix 3 for membership).

The Workers' Educational Association, the Mary Ward Centre and the Working Men's College described how they had developed tools to match the needs of management, tutors and students, consistent with their organisations' values and resource levels.

FEDA presented how learning outcomes can be defined and given credit within the evolving credit framework (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 4).

Discussion of the pilot initiatives ranged from finding clear indicators of development in terms of confidence, capability and increased flexibility, to accommodating the various metaphors that people used to indicate progress or benefits. For example:

- the metaphor of the 'journey', which underpinned 'distance travelled'
- the 'ladder of progression' for academic achievements
- the 'river', broadening and deepening in terms of understanding and confidence
- the 'widening circle' of autonomy.

There was general recognition that ways of recording outcomes would need to be very flexible in order to accommodate the different perspectives, values, purposes and resources that would be brought to bear in different organisations.

Initial concerns about providing evidence for funders had shifted to examining ways of using evidence of outcomes to improve the quality of provision, particularly of teaching and learning.

Conclusions from the colloquium

1 Introducing an institutional strategy

Purposes

- Different institutions had different needs.
- Any instrument had to be flexible and responsive to institutional and national agendas.

Process

- Introducing a scheme for identifying and assessing learning outcomes would need clear articulation of benefits, time and trust.
- Time for analysis should not be underestimated.

Involving tutors

Staff development needed to include how to:

- write learning objectives and outcomes
- introduce the concept to students and change attitudes
- use feedback from outcomes to improve teaching.

Language

- Educational 'jargon' should be avoided at all costs.
- 'Free writing' by students is difficult to analyse.
- There should be a span from qualitative to quantitative evidence of learning outcomes.

Uses

- There would appear to be clear benefits for students, tutors, managers, inspectors and funders.
- Some organisations were concentrating on management uses, others on improving tutors, and some were trying to get a balance among all stakeholders.

2 The benefits

Identifying and assessing learning outcomes can offer the benefits listed below.

For the learner

- Clearer information about the course
- A more reflective approach to learning
- Recognition of the importance of confidence
- The ability to make and value own judgments on progress
- Group cohesion through discussing course aims and outcomes

For the tutor

- Improvements to planning and reviewing courses
- A framework for negotiating with the group
- A way of reviewing progress on group and individual objectives
- An improved quality of teaching

For the providers

- A way of identifying staff development needs
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators of student satisfaction
- Improvements in the quality of curriculum planning
- A clearer framework for establishing progression routes

For national organisations

- A way of identifying learning gains for funding purposes
- A way of giving credibility to unaccredited learning
- A means of recognising the broader outcomes of adult learning
- A basis for self-assessment reports and evidence for inspectors

The background to this project exemplifies many of the questions that have to be addressed in identifying and valuing learning outcomes:

- What exactly are learning outcomes?
- Who defines them?
- Who assesses them?
- Who takes responsibility for identifying and measuring them?
- How do you make the processes conform, to the resources available?
- What do you actually end up measuring – performance against criteria, actual outcomes, or only those that are measurable?
- What kinds of evidence can we accept/will funders accept/will students accept?
- Who are the primary beneficiaries of the evidence? (Is it the learners, the teachers or the funders?)

Let us begin with trying to identify 'learning outcomes'.

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3 The outcomes: philosophy and learning models

Background

The drive towards accreditation in adult education services in the 1980s and early 1990s, which was embedded in the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, had complex origins. Firstly, in some respects it was an acceleration of moves towards greater accountability to learners within a more learner-centred curriculum which grew up in the late 1970s in adult learning. Concentrating on the outcomes of students' learning as much as the processes of teaching and learning was central to this thinking. Concepts and models of learning outcomes have been debated since this period. Secondly, the 1970s also saw the launch of a national drive for adult literacy, the growth of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and new provision for adult returners and access courses, with a greater emphasis on progression for adult learners without previous qualifications. The class, gender and ethnic composition of adult education altered. Progression was often focused on the movement from non-accredited (first step) to accredited (next steps) provision. Thirdly, from as early as the late 1970s, but nearly universally by the early 1980s, cuts to local authority provision for adults began to bite.

Funding for courses and programmes leading to vocational and academic qualifications was more secure. The culture of work-related provision for adults was fostered through funding from the Manpower Services Commission, to whom many local authorities and voluntary providers turned. Within a stringent financial climate and with high levels of unemployment, the drive to accreditation through clear progression routes grew stronger. The government of the day made choices about the kinds of learning it wished to fund, and prioritised qualifications. The divide between unaccredited adult learning (non-Schedule 2) and learning leading to recognised qualifications in a national framework (Schedule 2) was incorporated into the 1992 Act, leaving the former particularly vulnerable with local authority funding under continued pressure. The divide was not clear cut, however. A significant amount of 'non-Schedule 2' provision was swept up into the FE sector with the designated colleges and the WEA. The FE/HE Act gave FEFC responsibility for these institutions with their special character and mission. Their provision included both non-Schedule 2 and Schedule 2 provision. In addition in the Local Education Authority (LEA) sector, the new unitary authorities have duties which include to 'secure' adequate adult education.

All three types of adult education providers and their learners need a framework through which the goals and outcomes of learning can be meaningfully understood and appraised. This is not only to increase the security of funding. It is to ensure that learners, tutors and organisations can work together to measure the value which adult learning adds in ways which are relevant and useful.

The philosophy of outcomes and of learning models deriving from it begins with a strong focus on learners' objectives. The focus on objective-setting presupposes that people can project aims, goals and intentions upon their future and strive to realise them through successive actions. It is the philosophy that underlies planning, that binds the present with future rewards, that defines 'needs' as the gap between where we are and where we want to be. It locates paradise as just ahead of us. Most people adopt a pragmatism that allows them to account for some things as 'nature-driven' ('That's the way I am.') and for other things as open to choice, intention and free will ('What do you want to do? Where do you want to be? How do you want to live?' and so on). We can feel powerless by self-persuasion or we can learn to change our situation and our perspective: our innate capacity to learn is an important component in determining the kind of life we live. Present action can influence future outcomes, and the design of future goals can motivate our endeavours.

The NVQ outcomes model

Although 'objectives' informed course preparation for the Open University in the early 1970s, a greater influence on the use of 'outcomes' has been Gilbert Jessup's work in developing the framework for the NVQs in the 1980s. His book, *Outcomes: NVQs and the emerging model of education and training* was published in 1991. A more accessible source is his chapter in *Outcomes, learning and the curriculum*, edited by John Burke, in 1995. There is

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much here that enthusiasts on either side of the adult education/vocational training divide could subscribe to. Jessup's theory is a unifying one:

> *The outcomes model is based upon the assumption that learning is a personal and individual experience and that to 'standardise' it by adopting specific modes and time periods is not the most effective means for a group to achieve a set of learning outcomes. Individuals need to manage their own learning experiences in a manner which recognises where they start from, their preferred styles and modes of learning, and the time and opportunities they have for learning. This is believed to be true for learners of all ages and becomes even more important for mature and adult learners, amongst whom individual differences and differences in opportunity are likely to be even greater than amongst the young.*

It separates out the requirements for an award or recognition from the course or training programme or personal learning activities used to generate the evidence of achievements or competence. It encourages people to acquire competence or achievements in any way conformable with their preferences, lifestyle or availability, whether they are formal or informal, part-time or full-time opportunities, and wherever the location. It encourages people to accredit previous learning, get recognition for learning at home, at work, or during leisure time.

Jessup envisaged the development of the Record of Achievement and the Portfolio of Evidence as useful ways for people to demonstrate achievements. The Portfolio represented a flexible way of assembling evidence in a range of media and modes appropriate to the learner (building on the way students in art and design had traditionally assembled evidence of accomplishment). Products were acceptable outcomes.

The notes to Jessup's article (p53) record some relevant comments on the relationship between teaching and learning:

> *Whereas 'learning' could be characterised without introducing the notion of teaching, 'teaching' could not be characterised without the notion of learning . . . The teacher's success . . . can only be defined in terms of that of the learner . . .*

This provides an interesting springboard for tackling teachers' objections to determining learning outcomes (see Section 4).

However, the original learner-centred model was modified in the NVQ model, where, to maintain national standards, outcomes were centrally defined. This created problems for many adult learners who just want to learn what meets their personal needs, which may of course include, or develop into job-related needs or academic aspirations. Many such people learn intermittently over a period of time, are often anxious about assessment and cannot accumulate all the evidence needed to demonstrate competence. There may also be no external requirement on learners to gain a qualification in order to meet their goals.

Objections to the model included:

- the confusion over outputs and outcomes
- the mechanistic behavioural model underlying competency
- the over-specification of learning objectives and performance criteria focusing only on the easily measured features and so on.

Similarly, the dominant model systems for relating resources and sources of performance indicators (inputs ⇢ process ⇢ outputs) drove attention towards the easily enumerated factors, rather than towards those factors which were less easily counted or measured.

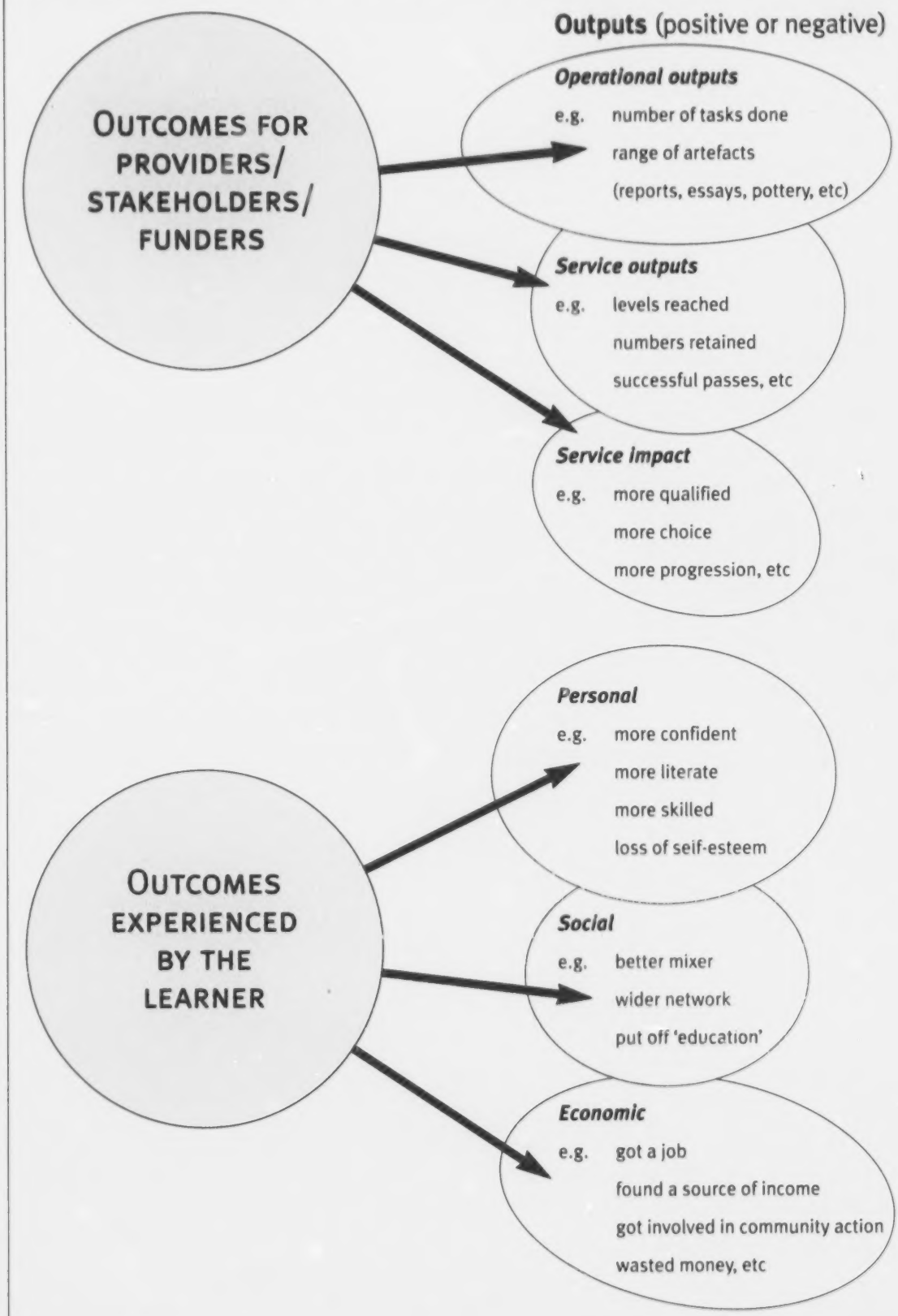
Different 'stakeholders' give different value to different interpretations of 'outcomes' and place emphasis on different components. For example, while students might concentrate on the benefits they are or are not experiencing, teachers might be required by their organisations and funding bodies to focus on 'outputs' and 'impact', and so leave the experienced benefits to be identified by a quality assurance process.

Figure 1 illustrates how outcomes may be seen as measurable outputs for the organisation and broader effects on the learner.

The variable use of the term 'outcomes' by different stakeholders led to:

- much anxiety and confusion about what an approach focused on learning 'outcomes' might entail
- different definitions emerging in different sectors of education and training.

Figure 1: Learning outcomes



Open College Networks and the credit framework

Open College Networks (OCNs) developed during the 1980s and 1990s in response to tutors' desire to provide recognition for a wider range of adult learning outcomes than mainstream qualifications acknowledged. OCNs provide recognition for learning programmes, and accreditation for the achievements of individual learners successfully completing these programmes.

The rationale for OCNs was that much valuable learning takes place – often in informal environments, in voluntary organisations, adult and community education centres, or in the periphery of colleges and other mainstream learning environments – which gains no formal recognition. Such learning is often targeted to meet the particular needs of groups of learners, which may be highly localised and individual. Because this learning does not lead to any formal recognition, it does not provide an easy basis for progression. In addition, this provision is outside normal quality assurance systems, and this affects the value given to the achievements of learners.

OCNs are regional consortia of providers, usually including FE colleges, higher education, voluntary and community and adult education centres and are now co-ordinated nationally by the National Open College Network which develops policy on behalf of its members.

OCN accreditation processes needed to be applied to a wide range of learning opportunities. Simple accreditation frameworks evolved with the following features:

- four levels of achievement to denote the complexity, learner autonomy and range of learning achieved: these correspond broadly to the 4 levels proposed by the Dearing Review of 16–19 qualifications.
- credits which are a means of measuring the volume of achievement. To establish the volume of achievement or credit value, the notional learning time required to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme is identified. This is divided by 30 to arrive at the number of credits.

Tutors need to specify the programme as a series of units of achievement in order for a learning programme to be recognised. A unit is defined as a coherent set of learning outcomes with assessment criteria which denote the standards which need to be achieved, the level and proposed credit value.

The rationale for specifying learning outcomes is explored in Christopher Parkin's paper (see Appendix 4):

> *Learning outcomes describe what a person knows, understands and is able to do after a process of learning. Making outcomes explicit can help both learner and tutor to understand what the learner is trying to achieve, to monitor achievement, and to decide what learning methods and activities may be most appropriate.*

To ensure quality, a panel of tutors experienced in the specific area of study, drawn from a range of providers, considers the consistency and coherence of the learning programme and has the authority to recognise learning programmes on behalf of the members of the OCN.

The OCN also organises moderation of the programme during delivery to ensure that the programme is being delivered as recognised, to moderate individual learner achievement, and to confirm the credits awarded to learners. Learners receive a credit record which identifies the units achieved, the learning outcomes, and the numbers of credits achieved at various levels.

Peer group processes spread and develop best practice, ensure shared understanding of standards and that decisions are made by informed and current practitioners. Courses accredited include return to study programmes and other programmes designed to provide access into specific qualifications within the mainstream framework, innovative short courses such as cultural literacy, Internet skills, access to FE and HE. The majority of Access to HE courses are now accredited by OCNs.

OCNs can accredit a wider and more varied range of learning outcomes than other awarding bodies as a result of the simplicity, flexibility and the localism of the processes, but they do require that the learning programmes are relatively formalised. Although there is an increasing move towards accreditation by bodies which have traditionally resisted such formalisation of provision, OCN accreditation will not be suitable for all learning opportunities. The paperwork and cost of accreditation through an OCN is not likely to be feasible for tutors providing programmes with a short shelf life or highly negotiated content.

The level of bureaucracy is a problem with all learning outcomes systems and OCNs are not alone in being criticised for the time and cost of the quality assurance processes. There are benefits and pitfalls in peer moderation.

In 1993, FEU published *A Basis for Credit?* which set out a vision of a credit-based framework of qualifications. This explores how the achievements and the processes developed by OCNs, might usefully be applied to the mainstream qualifications framework. FEU and FEDA have carried out a range of research and development projects and published a range of publications which explore the potential of credit-based approaches both to qualification design and to institutional approaches to quality, measuring value added and as the basis for funding.

In Wales, colleges have been collaborating with Open College Networks through the Welsh Office funded CREDIS project to explore the idea of a National Transcript of Student Achievement. The CREDIS transcript records all achievement in credits and levels within the FE Credit Framework. In Wales this process has been strengthened by linking funding from the FE Funding Council for Wales with the credit value of OCN units and the credit ratings of qualifications.

The transcript is intended as a summary sheet within the Record of Achievement, with all school, college, community or work-based learning outcomes added to the transcript during a lifetime of learning. Special projects in Wales have been investigating how student transcripts can form an integral part of student tracking systems and link seamlessly with the college management information systems. The summative transcript can evolve from the original learner agreement into a document to monitor student progress, before being printed as a final transcript of achievement whenever the student leaves the college.

The idea of the transcript has captured the imagination of the growing numbers of Credit Consortia across the UK and has the potential to form a national scheme, providing a useful formative and summative record for the individual, and aggregated information for institutions and regions. In parallel, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has been commissioned by the DfEE to develop the Profile, a computerised database to record individual learning achievements, initially for University entrance but with the potential to be developed as a lifelong record for individuals and a source of national data. This would complement the new National Record of Achievement (NRA) which is being trialled in 1997–98, where the emphasis is less on the record and more on learners acquiring the skills of planning, acknowledging and reflecting on a wide range of learning situations in order to become lifelong learners.

ACCREDITING LEARNING OUTCOMES: THE ISSUES FOR ADULT EDUCATION

In an article on accreditation for *Adult Learning*, 1993, Kathryn Ecclestone recognised that:

- more learners wanted proof of their *achievements*
- the Further and Higher Education Act tied larger proportions of public funds to specific, certificated outcomes
- the then Department of Employment was investing heavily in the accreditation of prior learning towards vocational qualifications, as steps towards the national education and training targets (NETTs)
- accreditation will change the way in which many education and training programmes are designed and implemented.

At the same time, growing numbers of informal and 'non-vocational' liberal adult education programmes and courses were being accredited in order to satisfy the funding criteria for Schedule 2 under the Further and Higher Education Act. This shifted debate towards the technicalities of accreditation and away from its impact on different groups of adults and the non-formal curriculum offer. Simultaneously, the humanist and liberal principles were being bundled up in statements of mission and general aims like 'To create access for the whole community, to empower learners through negotiation, to recognise their life experience . . . ', and so on – while at the same time steering them onto Schedule 2 provision and being obliged to maximise the number of units claimed by a number of ploys.

She saw the benefits in accreditation for teachers, who could make use of a framework which can help teachers and learners to recognise and assess what the learner can already do, what remains to be learned, create action plans and record achievements; and can form the basis for staff development.

She also saw benefits for adult learners in helping them make decisions about the suitability of programmes or about the order in which they learn the intended elements; and in generating evidence of learning or testing the value of what has been learned, which would also satisfy funders, employers and managers.

However, she also acknowledged that the drive to accreditation and an outcomes-based approach raised two serious questions:

- Are the technical processes and the intended targets the right ones?
- Are the educational values and principles which underpin them appropriate?

The underlying anxiety is that learning outcomes specified externally become the 'property' of awarding bodies, and the opportunity for learners *and* teachers to participate in shaping outcomes is lost. An accompanying fear is that more complex bundles of skills, such as creativity, critical reflection or the ability to work in a team, will be overlooked or omitted because their learning outcomes are difficult to define.

Older adult education concerns with joint exploration and creation of knowledge, shared ownership of negotiated programmes and the concept of education as a social movement are now being marginalised.

Kathryn Ecclestone acknowledges that many of those who denigrate accreditation have themselves usually enjoyed easy access to it. For many people, education serves a more instrumental purpose and they have been persuaded that accreditation is important. The rise of accreditation has attracted some people who previously might not have bothered. It has also put off many people who find the processes irksome.

The major question, as she sees it, is:

> *How can we use accreditation to enhance recognition of achievement whilst keeping the debate about access to a range of learning (outcomes), and about the purposes of learning and accreditation (in a lifelong framework) alive?*

She suggests a number of strategies:

- We have to challenge the use of humanist principles to promote what could be mechanistic and restrictive practices.
- We have to show that the ability to learn effectively is at the root of competence at all levels and in all contexts. We have to be less apologetic about intangible outcomes of learning and the outcomes of liberal and humanist education.
- Continuing professional development and
- better understanding about how people learn, cannot be replaced with 'teacher-proof' assessment systems.
- We need to know when accreditation is appropriate and beneficial, when it constrains achievement or access, and when using learning outcomes and assessment to support learning is enough without a formal certificate.

Her final *envoi* is very apt and powerful. If adult education is worth defending, it is worth finding better ways of defining its benefits.

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4 Approaches to gathering evidence of outcomes of learning

Case Study 1: Learning outcomes as a quality strategy

It was fitting that the 'challenge' issued by Kathryn Ecclestone in 1993 was at that time being taken up by organisations with a long commitment to liberal adult education such as the WEA and the London 'designated' colleges. The Eastern District of the WEA, partnered by the South Eastern District, acted as the pilot for a WEA project to develop a 'learning outcomes Strategy'.

The remit for the WEA research and development project was to identify acceptable means by which the WEA could demonstrate to itself, to its students and tutors, and to its funders, that worthwhile learning took place in its liberal studies (i.e. non-Schedule 2) courses. The main motive for the project was to be *quality*, not effectiveness. Quality education should demonstrate that learning was taking place. The project consultant, John Daines began by documenting the existing WEA practices for describing student learning and carrying out course evaluation. Simultaneously, he consulted part-time tutors (who formed the bulk of the teaching staff), field staff and Branch members to check out the acceptability, feasibility and practicalities of describing learning outcomes, and to draft a set of procedures. Once the procedures were available they were piloted by a group of tutors in their Branch courses. The feedback was then used to modify the procedures for each successive application.

The basic framework that evolved was:

- Tutors are required to produce syllabuses which make the proposed learning outcomes for their course explicit, in terms of what students should be able to do, think, feel or say as a result of their newly-acquired knowledge, understanding and skills.[1]
- These proposed outcomes are then agreed and acknowledged by each class member, forming a learning contract where fulfilment is describable by both parties. (The traditional flexibility of the 'negotiated' syllabus is not lost, since the learning outcomes agreed at the outset can be modified during the course.)
- At the end of the course, students are asked to judge the extent to which they have achieved the agreed learning outcomes, to identify other personal achievements resulting from the course, to suggest what 'next steps' may be undertaken, and to offer an evaluation of the course itself (see Appendix 5).

The requirement to prepare a syllabus with explicit learning outcomes was generally welcomed by tutors, while most students liked the new format *and* the opportunity to comment on the outcomes and their own achievements. What also emerged was the influence of the tutors' attitudes on students. In the Eastern District, where the procedure was implemented in 100% of classes, and 75% of students complied with the invitation to complete their learning outcome forms, there had been the opportunity to participate in the formulation of the scheme and tutors were by then more supportive. Students' responses elsewhere were more varied, and reflected tutor uncertainties.

At District level, its adoption was helped by the amended documentation arising from Stage 2 and the evaluation carried out by Mosaic, a specialist consultancy and training service (Astor, 1995). Mosaic's findings were:

1 The members (students), while recognising the social benefits of courses, see the WEA as 'a learning activity, opportunity provider'.

2 They see the learning objectives and outcomes as useful because:
they serve to focus the course, the tutor is better directed, they give students a degree of control over tutors in that courses can be re-directed. . .

3 The requirement to prepare a syllabus with explicit learning outcomes is broadly welcomed by tutors. (Where the approach was resisted, tutors felt it was inappropriate for courses concerned with developing the senses or values.)

4 The student responses on learning outcomes have enabled the review and reflection of many tutors to be more focused and developmental.

5 The learning outcomes approach is conceived by many students and branch officials as a strait-jacket, and the potential of the process as

an enabling framework has not been recognised. There is real concern that it reduces flexibility and response.

6 Some students and branches have resented the 'time taken out of the class' for discussion of the learning outcomes process. This reflects a perception of the scheme as something external to the class, and not part of a cycle of planning, delivery, learning and review (that they feel ownership of).

7 Some students and tutors made reference to the demands that reading and analysing student response forms made on tutors' time. *The Introduction of Learning Outcomes.* An Evaluation Report, April 1993.

8 There has been a wide variety of approaches in the presentation of 'learning outcomes' to students.

9 Members recognise the possible funding benefits of describing their learning, but they feel the 'rigour' of describing their learning achievements may not be appropriate for those people not seeking academic or vocational progression.

10 Progress in terms of qualifications or employment is appropriate for only some of the student body. The use of these words has been irritating to some students.

11 There is an anxiety among students and tutors that the Learning Outcomes Scheme is the first step on the route to formal assessment procedures for all classes.

12 Consultant queries include:
- Does the form need to include the student's name?
- Can it be single-sided?
- Can the language be made simpler?
- Can the distinction between student-related sections and course evaluation be made clearer?

A SWOT analysis of the introduction of learning outcomes led to the conclusions shown in Figure 2.

By October 1995 the National Association of the WEA was ready for the third stage of the project; to ensure the incorporation of the learning outcomes approach across all Districts as part of the national strategy for quality assurance in WEA provision. The adoption of the strategy was boosted at national level by the report of the FEFC inspection of the WEA (1995) that:

> *the introduction of the Learning Outcomes Approach has led to a clarity of objectives and schemes of work for each course; students can consider more carefully what they can get out of a course and what they might do afterwards.*

Figure 2: Conclusions from the SWOT analysis of the introduction of learning outcomes

Strengths	***Opportunities***
• Clearer syllabus • Enables informed choice • Provides a sound basis for negotiation/discussion • Facilitates individual student reflection • Gives evidence of perceived learning • Assists tutors' structured reviews • Informs tutor planning for next course • Tutor commitment	• Informed evaluation by all tutors • Improved quality of teaching • Improved opportunities for learning • Clearer information on learning across the District(s) • Challenge to entrenched styles of teaching
Weaknesses	***Threats***
• Confusion about purpose • Inconsistency in presentation to students • Uncommitted tutors • Inappropriate language • Alienation of some branches and tutors	• Perceived loss of independence • Perceived loss of flexibility • A concern about 'big brother' • Challenge to current styles of teaching • Perceived as first step to accreditation

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John Daines recognised that his strategy was but one approach to gathering evidence of outcomes, and that other adult agencies may have to develop their own approaches. However, one route was to adapt the procedures and proformas developed for the WEA. He offered the guidelines listed below.

- Proposals would have to be culturally compatible with values and traditions (for instance, summative assessment had been rejected, but not 'self-description of learning').
- Student responses would have to be voluntary and possibly anonymous if resistance was to be overcome.
- Procedures would have to be organisationally feasible and administratively viable.
- Planned and targeted staff training would be necessary to influence attitudes positively, deal with procedures and enable the skills of syllabus writing to be developed.
- Careful consideration would have to be given to briefing/informing students – whether through newsletters, class tutors or meetings with student associations. (Much would depend upon the attitudes and support of students.) The slogan 'the effective learner is a reflective learner' may have to be invoked.
- The key framework to operate within was the quality framework. However, this meant that the monitoring, evaluation and follow-up action on tutors' reports had to be taken seriously, and tutors themselves had to take note of what students were describing.

The main outcomes from any strategy were likely to be:

- A syllabus which focuses on teaching and learning in ways that benefit both tutors and students, and a procedure which provides clear evidence of learning.
- Tutors actually discuss learning and achievement and report on student responses.
- Students have a purchase on the control of their course and a personal record of their achievement.

The WEA process is:

> *patently based upon qualitative judgement and does not lend itself to quantitative tinkering or reduction to simplistic indices. As such, the approach has met the original aim of identifying acceptable means of demonstrating that worthwhile learning takes place in liberal studies courses. Moreover, it has created a body of information that offers greater knowledge about, and confidence in the quality of the curriculum being provided, the teaching being offered and the learning that results.*

The WEA experience represents a body of information about the application of the Learning Outcomes model in a liberal adult educational context. However, there were other initiatives taken in different organisational contexts, and it is to these that we now turn.

Case study 2: Measurement of learning outcomes in short courses: a pilot scheme at the Mary Ward Centre 1995–96

The scheme was designed for short courses of no more than 20 hours duration all taught by part-time tutors. It has a standard form used for a very wide range of subjects. The pilot included woodwork, painting, yoga, aromatherapy, creative writing, violin, computing and foreign languages. The Mary Ward Centre is a designated Adult Education College funded by the FEFC. Of its 7,000 part-time students, less than 100 opt to take an external certificate. As experimentation is valued, unexpected outcomes have to be catered for. The scheme also enabled both tutors and students to be involved in identifying outcomes, through a process of setting and reviewing objectives.

All Mary Ward courses have their own set of learning 'objectives' devised by the tutor, with Centre guidance. Since non-Schedule 2 courses do not have externally imposed objectives, the class can collectively negotiate a redefinition of learning objectives. Individual student objectives, outside those for the class, are also permitted. Students are then invited to select up to three objectives from the main menu as their personal learning priorities. The form (see Appendix 5) is usually introduced in the second meeting (this took about half an hour) and reviewed in the penultimate meeting. There is space alongside the students' comments on progression for supportive comments from tutors.

At the end of the course, students are invited to rate how far they consider they have achieved their learning objectives on a scale of one to five with five representing a level of achievement much greater than anticipated. The office then makes a calculation

to see what percentage of students consider they have broadly achieved their objectives and what the success rate is for each course. For example a creative writing class where the tutor ensured students were very aware of their progress had high scores, whereas a beginners language course where there were false expectations or a weakness in the initial dialogue, had low scores. Class scores in the pilot ranged from 3.92 to 2.33. Over two-thirds of students 'achieved', giving a score of three or above. In staff development, the management were able to help tutors identify common pitfalls and good features when setting learning objectives or helping students to do so.

The scheme has the following benefits:

- It raises both tutors' and students' awareness of the need to have specific and achievable objectives which are realistic within the timespan of the course.
- It is simple and quick to administer. This is important in a Centre with 12,500 course enrolments, 950 courses and a full-time staff equivalent of 28.
- It can be used for any course, whatever the subject.
- It permits individual student variation.
- It is a useful management tool as a general indicator of students' assessment of their learning and of the performance of different courses and tutors.
- It can act as a measure of 'learning gain'.

It has the potential to be used in the FEFC college's self-assessment process, if evidence of the students' work is incorporated.

The following difficulties need to be overcome:

- tutors may see this as an additional and unwelcome workload
- students may express irritation at an additional piece of 'non-learning' work.

Case study 3: Learning diaries in a residential setting – Northern College

The learning diary was designed to record the learning of students on the Northern College Pathways Programme. Intensive staff development sessions were held in September 1996 and adjustments to the learning diary were made after consultation with all members of the academic and course office staff. A task group monitors the use of the learning diaries and periodically consults with staff, and a rolling programme of staff development is in place. At present the diaries are used for the award of credit at OCN levels 1, 2 or 3. However, the learning diaries could be developed as an instrument to record learning outcomes on non-accredited courses.

The learning diary is designed to allow for flexibility in the way it can be used. The first section allows the reader to record previous related learning that might be relevant to the course, in their community, voluntary group, trade union, at home or at work. It also allows them to reflect and record anything they have read or heard on the subject, recognising that people learn in a multiplicity of ways and contexts which they may not see as valid when compared to the formal classroom lesson. The learner is also encouraged to record what they hope to get from the course, providing their own benchmark from which to gauge their experience of the course. The second section allows the learner to record learning as it takes place during the course, either at the end of each teaching session or at the end of each day. Learners may record examples of new information or skills learned or developed during the sessions. They also may indicate if the session has clarified or changed their views on a topic or any other way they feel they have learned. The third section allows the learner to record learning at the end of the course. Learners can record how they might use what they have learned on the course, in their community, voluntary group, trade union, at home or at work. They are encouraged to consider plans for continuing their studies as well as how and where they may access future courses.

Together these three stages allow a significant opportunity for the learner to record their learning and the learning experience. The latter is particularly of relevance given the residential nature of the Northern College's courses. For many students, past and present, it is the residential factor that has accelerated their learning experience. Diaries not only allow the students to record this but, more importantly, to reflect upon this factor. Not all students complete every section or answer every question, nor is it necessary that they do so. The learning diary is a generic instrument which is applied to a wide variety of courses. The diaries can be (and are) customised to suit the needs of particular students and/or courses.

Additional evidence may also be presented in support of the learning diaries. Where the learning diaries are inappropriate they are substituted by

other methods of recording evidence of learning. Some of these have proved particularly useful for disabled students or students with learning difficulties. However, the learning diary forms the central implement for measuring learning on the part-time programme. In order to achieve OCN Level 3 credits additional evidence must support the learning diary.

However, these diaries are not without their problems. The Northern College student population is drawn from some of the most disadvantaged communities in the region whose past experiences of education are largely of failure. Forms of any kind are seen at best as an inconvenience and at worst with suspicion. This is one reason for the close scrutiny during the first year of the learning diary and the monitoring and evaluation of student usage and student views of the learning diary. Learning from experience on the accredited courses, it is hoped that the learning diary model will provide a framework for measuring learning outcomes on non-accredited courses.

Case study 4: Recording achievement to recognise learning outcomes – Hillingdon Adult and Continuing Education Service

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) developed alongside other initiatives, such as NVQs, which encouraged learners to build up a portfolio of their learning achievements. Although intended for all learners, the NRA was seen to have particular value as a means of recording small steps of achievement for those who did not have formal qualifications. It is also a means of recording voluntary activities and personal achievements which are not accredited (many have since been accredited through key skills). Following the review of the National Record of Achievement in 1996 (as part of the Dearing Review), the new NRA being trialled in 1997 will have a greater emphasis on the *process* of action planning and review, and on its use as a tool for lifelong learning. The case study that follows is an early attempt to introduce recording achievement to adults.

In 1994–95 Hillingdon Adult and Continuing Education Service ran a pilot project to introduce records of achievement (RoA) as a way of gathering evidence of learning outcomes (this was reported by Dr Geoff Trodd in *Adult Learning* Vol 7, No 8, p189). The project was initiated with 'mixed feelings': 'As long as students came and paid their fees, who had the right to ask if any learning was actually taking place?' However, the pressure for increased accreditation, the example of the WEA initiative and the rapid growth of Open College Network courses encouraged the Hillingdon Service to emphasise parity of esteem between the FEFC funded work and liberal/ traditional adult education, in the belief that:

> *the LEA funded non-Schedule 2 part of the service was not judged inferior to the FEFC funded Schedule 2 sector because it lacked any recognisable accreditation or system of assessing outcomes.*

At the outset it was decided that the National Record of Achievement folder would *not* be used, since many sections were not relevant. Instead, they would devise a *format* for recording achievement which would cover:

- clarification of learning outcomes in each course or subject area
- determination of assessment procedures to be used
- a common recording process
- eventual accreditation through the Hillingdon Education Business Partnership (the accrediting body for RoAs in schools and colleges in Hillingdon).

Those courses to be involved in the pilot project were identified in the brochure and an accompanying information leaflet for students was printed. This was available *via* an enrolment procedure and also distributed to all students enrolling for the courses participating in the project. The take-up of an RoA was optional: an entitlement rather than an obligation. The student's decision did not have to be made at the first session, when they were also supplied with a list of the intended learning outcomes for their course.

Of the 272 students enrolled, 78% decided to commence the RoA exercise. Of these, 82% completed (ranging from 91% on computing courses to 64% in modern languages).

The format for recording and assessing achievement allowed for both formative and summative assessment, and enabled students to set their own targets and monitor their ongoing performance. Towards the end of the course, students could discuss an action plan with their tutor to help with any forward planning. After completion of the whole process, RoAs were returned to students, along with a certificate of accreditation from the Hillingdon

Education Business Partnership, and an internal certificate from the Adult and Continuing Education Service.

Ninety-five per cent of students and 100% of tutors completed the evaluation. The tentative findings are listed below, starting with the students.

- Few students had joined a course because it offered an RoA. The majority of those completing an RoA would take another course in the future.
- Virtually all students found the list of learning outcomes useful and would not wish to see any changes.
- Most students welcomed an action plan, but some found it unnecessary.
- Changes in the format used for recording and assessing achievements were suggested, particularly with regard to *simplifying* the forms and leaving space for more comments. Overall satisfaction that progress and achievements could be seen at a glance was expressed.
- Only four replies were critical of the project; these students believed the time and effort required were wasted and that the paperwork involved was unnecessary and a waste of money for the whole service.
- The following comments were more positive and supportive:
  - It makes you work harder.
  - I now have a very useful reference book to help me with future work.
  - At first I was doing this course for my pleasure only, but because of the record of achievement I have developed my interest further and set up a small workshop . . .
  - It was useful for showing my manager what I had achieved.

  The fact that the whole process had received external accreditation was much appreciated.

The tutors' responses were constructive:

- All claimed to be happy with the list of learning outcomes, which allowed for negotiation with students.
- There was a general desire to simplify the format for recording achievements.
- Using the RoAs had made them more organised, with lesson plans easier to structure and the approach to achieving outcomes becoming more systematic. It helped clarify which students needed more help, though it did not distinguish between students who were good and those who were just coping.
- The 'downside' for tutors was the additional time needed for coursework, recording and training. They estimated the time required (15 minutes per session) added up to eleven hours additional work over a course year. (This did not include time spent on action-planning.)
- All the tutors involved indicated a willingness to teach an RoA course again.

The project was widened and extended into a second year, with changes in documentation and wider regional accreditation. The project was adjudged to be supportive of the traditional ethos of non-vocational education because it:

- motivated students to take greater responsibility for their own self-assessment and learning
- identified the crucial role of *part-time* tutors as 'gatekeepers', in that enthusiastic tutors were more likely to be subject specialists who were keen to demonstrate evidence of learning than full-time staff.

However, the project left Hillingdon with few false hopes about funding learning through Records of Achievement. Their external accreditation pleased students but did not satisfy FEFC funding requirements. Their pilot project did suggest that RoAs could encourage active learning, but it could not achieve parity of esteem for non-Schedule 2 provision.

Case Study 5: Identifying a range of outcomes from 'leisure' courses – Gloucestershire ACET

Due to the funding divide separating adult education into either vocational or non-vocational courses or Schedule 2 and non-Schedule 2 courses, from 1993 onwards there was interest in exploring how students applied their learning, irrespective of which kind of course they had acquired their learning from. There was anecdotal evidence that people did use learning acquired on non-vocational (non-Schedule 2) courses in order to help them with access to income, employment or promotion. If this were true, it would appear to undermine the justification for

the 'funding divide', since both kinds of course could lead to similar 'outcomes', in terms of use of learning.

Early in 1994, Gloucestershire's Adult Continuing Education and Training Service (ACET) commissioned NIACE to conduct a pilot study on the uses to which people were putting the skills and knowledge gained in art, craft and modern language courses (see *Adults Learning*, February 1995, p.172). The principal aim was to identify the range of economic outcomes (such as gaining work, changing career direction, getting access to income, and so on) from participation in so-called 'leisure courses'. The project not only showed that students were applying their learning in a wide range of practical/economic ways, but it also emphasised:

- the important role that adult education plays in the lives of people in rural areas:
  People new to the area, particularly those in small villages, need the social contact as well as the satisfaction of achievement.
- the range of benefits people derive from participation:
  I am getting good enough to sell my pieces thanks to this course. I have learned new and rare skills and have transformed my life with a greater appreciation of the arts, porcelain and china.
- the widespread belief in the intrinsic benefits of personal enjoyment and social development:
  Courses like this ***always*** *make a difference. The added skills, confidence and morale boost increase the quality of life for me and my family.*

The survey took place in February 1994, at a time when weather plays a big role in attendance. Even so, 50 venues across Gloucestershire were covered, and 879 students responded. Forty-two per cent of respondents were attending a course for the first time.

All the respondents cited a combination of reasons for attending a class: the main ones were to gain new skills, or to develop new or existing interests. A sizeable proportion of those taking modern language courses had expectations of communicating better when travelling or taking up work or residence in another country. Retired people gave social and recreational reasons as the main motivations.

Few started with the explicit intention to use their learning to progress up the academic/educational ladder. (This information was in conflict with what tutors believed.) A high proportion on some courses (such as 50% in Calligraphy and 20% in Modern Languages) said that they were looking to use their skills to get employment. A similar proportion was interested in 'some kind of economic activity', like selling their pictures, products, and so on.

The broad economic outcomes or uses of the learning included:

- making, refurbishing or repairing items (the majority of students on craft courses) for themselves, family and friends
- making and selling items for income (such as clothes, furniture and cards) or accepting commissions
- starting a business (particularly students on Pottery, Textiles, Upholstery and Sugarcraft courses). A high proportion had previously been made redundant.
- using skills in current employment. Those seeking to improve their skills in Art and Craft classes included professional and semi-professional artists, art teachers, interior designers and one architect. Foreign language students were particularly likely to be applying their new skills within their current employment.
- changing career. Some students reported making a complete career change on the basis of newly-acquired learning. Several previously unemployed students reported that courses had enabled them to find work.

If one widens the scope of application beyond income-bearing employment, then the following social participation and community benefits are evident:

- using skills for the benefit of charities or voluntary organisations
- using language skills to facilitate contact with or residence in another country
- passing skills and knowledge on to others
- developing complementary skills to broaden their social opportunities.

The personal benefits, in terms of enhanced lives, were:

- increased social contact, especially for elderly people, and those in rural areas
- therapeutic benefits, particularly relaxation and stimulation
- enhanced ability to contribute to family life perhaps through family business or homework

- **increased confidence and self-esteem. This is always reported as a clear benefit of adult education. This whole latter category of benefits can be associated with *process outcomes*.**

As might be expected, the confidence to move on and enrol on another course was a common outcome that was not originally seen as an objective or intention. Unintended outcomes can be just as important as the intended ones, since it is the unintended outcomes which are often indicative of human development and the ability to change.

The Gloucestershire survey also revealed: 'the rejection of what was perceived as a growing and inappropriate national stress on the utilitarian approach to education'. The study highlighted the economic and therapeutic benefits of adult education and the development of confident learners. Students wrote to their councillors in support of the service and extolled its value in their lives. They not only appreciated the service, but were prepared to pay for it and defend it.

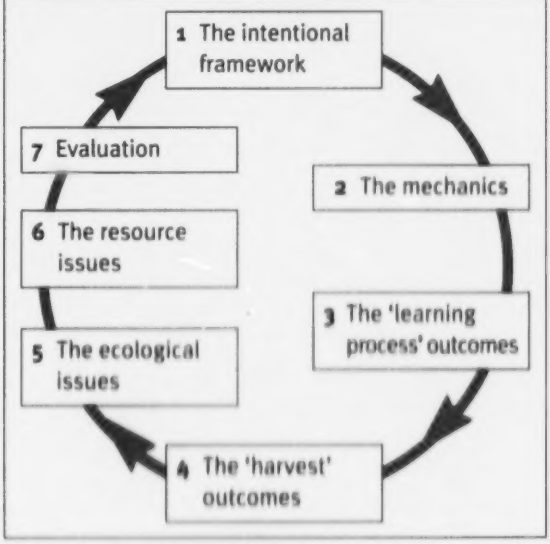
5 Practical frameworks for developing learning outcomes strategies

Having looked at the development of thinking on learning outcomes and some of the attempts to develop evidence of achievements for traditional or liberal adult education we are in a better position to clarify the issues, for organisations, tutors and learners.

THE ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

One way of representing the issues for organisations is with a 'cycle of concerns' like the one shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: A cycle of concerns



As in any cyclical process, one can enter at any point. The issues can be expressed as a series of questions for those considering gathering evidence of outcomes.

A CHECKLIST FOR ORGANISATIONS INTRODUCING A LEARNING OUTCOME STRATEGY

1 The intentional framework

- Will the learning outcomes be determined by quality systems, funding regimes, national policy or another factor?
- What's the purpose of the scheme?
- Will the learning outcomes be imposed or negotiated with learners?
- Will the process be led by managers, tutors or students?
- Will the purpose or necessity of a learning outcomes strategy be justified to teachers and learners by funding, politics, benefits to students or another factor?
- Will evidence of intended and unintended outcomes be gathered?
- Who will have ownership of the record of learning outcomes?

2 The mechanics

- How will the public learn about the scheme and its benefits?
- How will 'learning outcomes' be explained, prompted or collected? Who is responsible for which part of the process?
- What will constitute acceptable evidence?
- Will the evidence be recorded, celebrated, accredited, acted upon or otherwise?
- For how long and in what form will it be kept?

3 The 'learning process' outcomes (during the learning period)

- Will the scheme accept the learning outcomes from the process as well as the content (confidence, self-knowledge, inter-personal skills, assertiveness, study skills, and so on)?
- Will the scheme acknowledge learning gains at different stages?

  This would involve questions like:
  - Are you getting what you want?
  - Are you making progress and, if so, where?
  - What difference is the course making?
  - What are you discovering that you didn't expect?
- Will the scheme consider different orders of learning outcomes including development of skills and new attitudes as well as knowledge?

  This would include questions like:
  - How do you feel now?
  - What do you think at this stage?
  - What new skills have you developed?
  - How have your attitudes changed?
- Does the scheme acknowledge the process of building a portfolio of work as well as its value as an end-product of learning?

4 The 'harvest' outcomes (at the end of the learning period)

- How will evidence of intended or unintended outcomes be gathered?
  (Will it be by verbal testimony by self or others, written testimony by self or others, products, portfolios, expressive items, and so on?)
- How will the evidence be assessed and by whom?
- Whose evidence is sought on whether learning outcomes are achieved?
- What will be the status of different forms of evidence (such as tutor observation; witness reports; written reflection; products, leavers' contributions to group discussion and so on)?
- When will evidence be gathered and over how long a period?
- Which ways of valuing/celebrating the achievement of outcomes will be used? (Will it be a copy of a report, award, album, video, magazine, exhibition or event?)

5 The ecological issues

- Are the benefits of the scheme worth the effort?
- Does it benefit enough people?
- Is the scheme benign in its impact on student/staff, staff/management relations?
- What is the evidence useful for? (Educational record, confidence raising, social/economic/environmental benefits?)
- Is evidence gathering environmentally friendly? (Is it oral evidence, paper, electronic or otherwise?)
- How can the value of the learning and the scheme be charted once the learner has moved on?
- Is the scheme sustainable?

6 The resource issues

- Is the scheme manageable within current resources?
- Is the evidence gathering administratively possible?
- If you need additional resources (time, people, equipment and capital) what can you draw on? (Staff take on new roles, volunteers offer giftwork, students do more for themselves, part-timers/casual labour at key times, and so on.)
- Who pays for the evidence gathering? (Is it students, an organisation, funding bodies, or other?)

7 Evaluation

- What are the benefits to the organisation in terms of quality, cost benefit, improved continuation and progression and so on?
- What do the tutors and students think of the scheme?
- Can the evidence be used for other purposes (such as self-assessment, inspection, curriculum and staff development)?
- What would you change next time round (for example clarify intentions etc)?
- What is the value added for individuals, organisations and the national well-being? (Can the value added by the learning contribute to NTETS aim of 'self-reliance, flexibility and breadth'?)

Obviously the values of an organisation will 'thread through' and influence decisions on each of the 'bundles' of issues, and choices in one sector will influence the options taken up in other sectors of the

Figure 4: The ecology of learning		
Fifth level	Statutory/Quango/Accreditation requirements, funding, inspection, validation, auditing, etc	Plans, reports, systems, audits, self-assessment, etc
Fourth level	Activities to support organisation, bidding for funds, quality assurance, examinations	Bids, plans, systems
Tertiary level activities	Management activities to support learning	Meetings, reports/plans, staff development, etc
Secondary activities	Information and guidance, evidence gathering	Plans, documents, procedures, instruments, records
Primary level activities	Tutors provide learning support, teaching, etc Learning converts experience into knowledge, skills, etc	Outcomes Objectives Needs

cycle. The WEA, for example, decided that the aims of the Learning Outcomes project were to enhance quality; to promote negotiation of outcomes; to set up an open process which allowed students and tutors to clarify intentions/objectives; recognise unintended outcomes (though focusing on agreed ones); rely largely on students' written responses for evidence; produce benefits for all the participants; keep the 'administration' within bounds and the paper involved within reasonable limits.

Different organisations will give priority to different aspects. For example, most examining bodies impose the learning outcomes, so there can be no negotiation. They are less concerned with 'learner autonomy' than maintenance of 'standards'. Many providers ignore the outcomes from the learning process, such as growing confidence and self-reliance, and only focus on outcomes which are easily measured, or intended. All these decisions impact on factors like adult autonomy, ownership, motivation and continuing attendance, 'return business', and so on. However, OCN schemes, and to some extent developments in the accreditation of key skills in personal development (managing own learning, team-working and problem-solving) are an attempt to find a middle way.

A key factor for many traditional adult education organisations and particularly those in the local authority sector, is how much of their resources will be taken up by a new learning outcomes scheme. Most have very flat management structures, very limited and often part-time administrative support, and a majority of part-time teaching staff. Asking people in such structures to take on an overburden of administrative, monitoring and recording/interpreting duties, particularly if there are no clearly identifiable benefits is a high risk venture. In the current ecology of learning the overburden of administration has grown dramatically, reflected in the rise of administrative support in colleges and the growing demands on managers, administrative staff and tutors elsewhere, as shown in Figure 4.

Although spending on formal education in the statutory sector has risen, there are more agencies intercepting the application of resources to simply providing learning opportunities. As a result, more of a teacher's, manager's and administrator's time is now spent on generating evidence for those at a 'higher' level (as shown in Figure 4). Consequently, managers and part-time tutors particularly are now asking the 'ecological' questions such as:

- Who requires (or needs) this evidence?
- For what purposes do they need this evidence?
- Who will benefit?
- Who pays for its collection?
- How much paper and stress is involved?
- How do we measure the value it adds?

THE LEARNER PERSPECTIVE

The term 'outcomes' is used in many different ways and with different implications. The WEA and Hillingdon (and most Higher Continuing Education courses) have tried to limit the use of 'outcomes' to 'learning outcomes' which can be translated into or from 'learning objectives'. However, learners, unless they have incorporated the terminology of their teachers, tend to think of 'outcomes' either as the uses to which the learning can be put, in other words as benefits or as applications of the benefits. It might be helpful, therefore, to represent outcomes in a framework like the one shown in Figure 5, which tries to separate out the uses of learning from the learning itself, and use 'learner friendly' language at the same time.

Such a framework could accommodate both accredited and non-accredited, formal and informal learning; it would absorb the range of benefits adults get from learning, both in terms of the learning process itself and the eventual uses of the actual learning. It would register those aspects of learning which people value – from stimulation to getting a job – (for example, if someone leaves a Schedule 2 course to take up a job, the provider gets no recognition); and facilitate cooperation between teachers and learners in a joint endeavour to create evidence of learning that is useful to both parties.

Furthermore, the framework could help learners orientate and organise themselves; focus the learning providers' resources on enabling learners to become partners in the move towards greater clarity and transparency in getting evidence of learning and its uses; and perhaps persuade funding bodies to widen their scope on what constitutes useful personal, social and economic learning.

The markers of progress which link with 'process outcomes' need not be complex. If something like the six-step model for learning and learning support is used, then students' reported evidence of 'anxiety', 'confidence', and demonstrated motivation, flexibility, and so on, can be represented as shown in the six step model in Figure 6 on the previous page.

Figure 5: A framework for outcomes

The uses of your learning

- To give you stimulation and confidence
- To give you knowledge and skills
- To pass an exam/to get a certificate
- To help you get a job
- To help you help others (such as your children)
- To help your everyday life (such as mending your car)

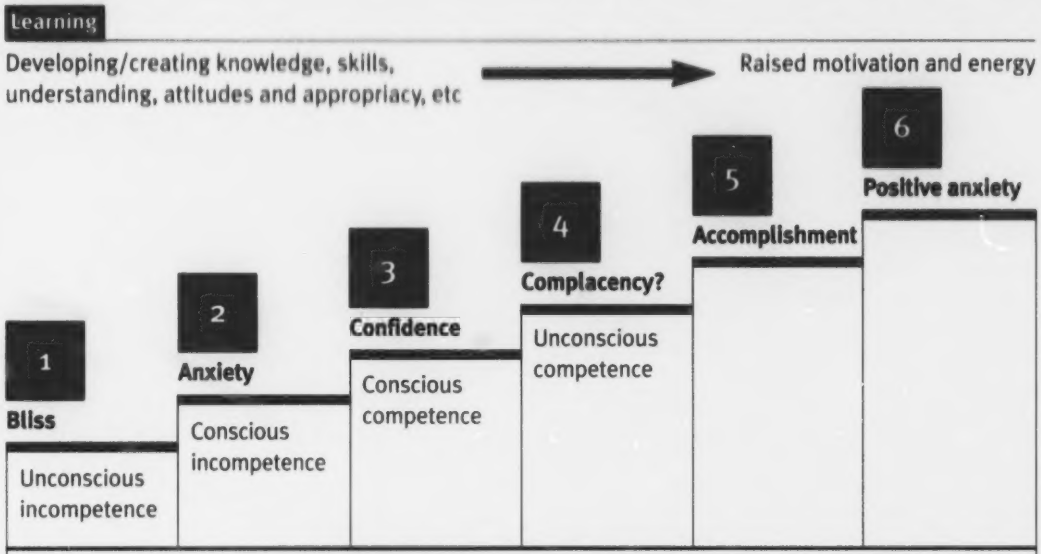
Finding out what you have learned

- Reflect on past progress and skills or knowledge gained
- Set learning targets, then measure your progress against them
- Someone else helps you measure your progress
- You produce things, do things that you and others can assess against standards, etc

Finding out how you learn best

- Trial and error
- Keeping a record and reflecting on knowledge or skills gained
- Getting feedback from people
- Trying new methods
- Intensive checks over a period
- Seeing results quickly

Figure 6: The six step model for learning and learning support



Learning support range

Information and publicity	Preparation	Quality models	Real application	Knowing how much more there is to learning	Guidance on next steps
Tasters	Essential learning skills	Quality feedback (formative) • from peers • from tutors/ experts	Formative and normative feedback	Re-orientation	
Outreach	APL		Tests/ confirmation, etc	Reviewed purpose/ ambition	
Videos – spoken	Testimony from earlier students	Exposure to real challenges	Keeping up to date		
	Reflection		Wanting to learn more		
	Easy targets and early success				
	Gallery of student products and creations				

As we have seen, the term 'outcomes' could cover 'learning outcomes', 'outputs' and the uses of learning. We saw also that generally no distinction was made between 'process outcomes' and the 'harvest outcomes', whether intended or unintended.

A DUAL PERSPECTIVE?

This section proposes that students and tutors need to be able to describe general learning outcomes in their own words, but that it may be possible to design a tool which organisations could use to gather the information they need, without overburdening the learners. The organisation's 'template' would differ, depending on its key interest (such as quality, curriculum or staff development, funding, student progression).

All learning opportunities should be able to demonstrate that they have helped students to:

- increase their confidence
- improve their capacity to continue or apply learning
- deepen their knowledge or understanding
- acquire new skills (either in relation to their subject, or interpersonal skills).

These can be seen as *necessary* conditions by looking at potentially undesirable outcomes:

- loss of confidence
- inability to use or transfer learning
- more confused/narrowed vision
- inability to demonstrate new skills.

That is, there should be progress which can be demonstrated (through self-reflection, products, actions, attitudes). The problem is, that without external standards, it is hard to *measure* progress or learning gain, unless we know what the starting point is. Even so, we can anticipate that some students will move a long way, others very little and the gains will be in different kinds of learning.

A learning outcomes strategy will be designed differently depending on the relative importance of its key purposes (whether recording personal achievements or quality assurance systems is a primary or secondary intention) and the key stakeholders (institution, funder or student). Both the process and harvest outcomes will be affected.

What are the minimum prerequisites for the above broad outcomes which we could expect of all courses without distorting the diversity of what adult education offers?

- The tutor clarifies what the students can expect to gain from the course.
- The learner says what they want to gain from the course.
- The likely ways of acquiring these gains are clear.
- The ways in which the learning might be demonstrated are clear.
- The support students can expect from tutor and others is explicit.
- The organisation is realistic about what it can and cannot offer.
- The student is aware of the steps required to move on or apply the learning.

Almost all the items listed will benefit the organisation, the tutor and the learner in different ways. Some of the information will be supplied before (such as publicity), some at the start of the course, some during the learning process, and some at the end, or even at a later stage.

Unless the learning outcomes strategy is only there to benefit the student, where it can be totally subjective, there will be some external quality assurance mechanism. We have argued that there must be some demonstrable progress or movement in, for example, increased confidence, in skill acquisition or progress, in knowledge and/or understanding. The detail should not be required from the student, but should be applied as part of a rigorous quality 'template'. This will avoid:

- overloading the students with 'bureaucracy'
- worrying them about 'assessment'
- demanding burdensome specificity in describing outcomes
- inducing tutor resistance or tokenism.

For example, general learning outcomes (see Appendix 4) describe what a person knows, understands and is able to do as a result of a process of learning. Assessment criteria may be where the detail of specific learning is evidenced (for instance, How autonomous is the learner? How *much* is learned? Under what circumstances is the learning applied or used?).

But, rather than assessing the learner for accreditation, we want to demonstrate the progress of learning against externally offered outcomes and/or personal goals. So the objective is to analyse those personal statements in such a way that the organisation, tutor or inspector can assess relative strengths or weaknesses in the learning gained. An analogy would be textual analysis applied to a piece

Figure 7: Course outline (what the course offers)

	Outcome	*Prompts or questions for a learner's proforma*
A	i Course learning outcomes	**What should you be able to do by the end of the course?**
	ii Learning methods and support	**How we will help you learn.**
	iii Progression options	**What could you do next?**
B	**Learners' own desired outcomes**	**What do you hope to get out of the course?**
	i Confidence/competence	Personal confidence
	ii Knowledge	What new things do you want to know or understand?
	iii Skills	What new things will you be able to do?
	iv Applied outcomes	What do you want to use the learning for?
C	**Self-assessment (for distance travelled)**	**How confident are you now about the things you and the tutor have listed above?**
D	i Self-assessment: mid course (or specified times)	**How do you rate your confidence now?**
	ii New learning goals	**Are there any other things you started thinking or learning about during the course?**
E	i Preferred learning styles	**List the ways that you learn(ed) best.**
	ii Recording learning gains	**How are you showing – to yourself or others – that you are learning?**
F	i Self-assessment: confidence	**How do you rate your confidence now with regard to the items listed above?**
	ii Self-assessment: competence	**What can you do now (with help, or on your own) that you couldn't do before?**
	iii Self-assessment: original goals	**Have you achieved what you wanted?**
	iv Self-assessment: course outcomes	**Have you achieved what the course tutor expected?**
	v Evidence	**How can you show it to yourself and others?**
	vi Unexpected outcomes/social gains	**What have you gained from the course or from learning in a group that you did not expect to gain?**
G	**Progression/application**	**What do you hope to do with your learning in relation to the following:**
	i Role	your family or community role
	ii Education progress	further learning in different areas
	iii Employability	your job or job prospects
	iv Other	

of free writing, or analysis of semi-structured interviews, or assessing the quality of teaching from a classroom observation.

The chart in Figure 7 (see previous page) helps students to think about the following learning outcomes which were highlighted in Figure 5:

- eventual uses of their learning (what they hope to get out of the course)
- what they have learned (how to assess the distance travelled)
- how they learn best (reflection on learning styles).

It can be integrated into a common framework which would identify the aspects indicated in the chart which, if required, could be coded, analysed and recorded by the organisation offering the learning opportunities. The organisation could use the prompts in the right-hand column as the sort of questions which could be used in a learner's pro-forma. In order to measure the learning gain, or value-added of learning experiences, learners would need to respond to different parts of the framework at different times in the course. They would also need to use evaluative words to describe their experiences or their gains in confidence from, say, 'a lot' to 'not very much', possibly on a numerical scale.

6 Towards a culture of lifelong learning

There is growing acknowledgement of the importance of recognising the diversity of outcomes from learning. This is as true in higher education as it is in adult and further education.

'Learning Works', the report of the FEFC's widening participation committee, chaired by Helena Kennedy (1997), makes a strong case for widening, not just increasing participation in post-16 education. Helena Kennedy argues in her introduction that economic arguments for a widening of participation in education should be matched by making social cohesion a prominent goal for education. Describing colleges which offer a non-discriminatory service to all sections of the community:

> *They see education as being more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills. In a system so caught up in what is measurable, we can forget that learning is also about problem-solving, learning to learn, acquiring the capability for intelligent choice in exercising personal responsibility. It is a weapon against poverty. It is a route to participation and active citizenship.*

By participation, the committee understood not only access, but also the success and progress of learners. Some of the recommendations support the findings of this FEDA study. For example, the recommendation that providers should establish new learning pathways which will enable adults to return to learning with the assurance that they will receive extra guidance and support, building on their earlier learning and skills, and be able to update themselves at a level and pace that suits them. There is strong support for a credit framework which would enable learners to get recognition for their achievements and build up credit throughout their lives – with a recommendation that a national credit framework should be implemented within five years.

The report notes that it is difficult to measure 'learning gain' outside traditional GCSE to A-level progression but urges that:

> *A nationally-agreed system of 'learning gain' is urgently required. This would provide a way of understanding and valuing all achievement.*

Work on identifying outcomes of adult learning may help in this process, although it is unlikely to provide statistically robust value-added data, because of the vast range of prior learning and attainment adults bring to new learning situations.

The acknowledgement of the broad outcomes of adult learning comes through clearly in the argument that 'all learning is valuable', citing learners who take up upholstery for personal reasons and end up starting a business, or the growth of leisure and tourism industries based around people's leisure pursuits.

> *Many of the skills and qualities required for success at work are the same as those required for success in personal, social and community terms . . . Participation in community life . . . (can) provide rich, diverse and accessible routes to learning. Those without these key capabilities will find themselves at a disadvantage in social and public life as well as in the labour market (page 17).*

Sir Ron Dearing's report on 'Higher Education in the Learning Society' (1997), published in the same month as 'Learning Works', also emphasises the importance of widening participation and that one of the key purposes of HE in sustaining a learning society is to:

> *inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment.*

These broad outcomes of learning would be supported by the development, in the medium term, of a 'Progress File' for each student, to provide 'a means by which students can monitor, build and reflect on their personal development' and a 'transcript of achievement' (Recommendation 20). The report also recommends that all HE provision should have learning outcomes. HE institutions should:

> *immediately develop, for each programme they offer, a 'programme specification' which*

identifies potential stopping off points and gives the intended outcomes of the programme in terms of:

- *the knowledge and understanding that a student will be expected to have upon completion*
- *key skills: communication, numeracy, the use of IT and learning how to learn*
- *cognitive skills, such as an understanding of methodologies or ability in critical analysis*
- *subject-specific skills such as laboratory skills*

(Recommendation 21)

Specifying outcomes in this way would undoubtedly clarify the benefits of higher education for students and employers; however, they may not identify the broader contribution of HE which Sir Ron Dearing alludes to in his description of the learning society.

THE EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT FINDINGS

The research undertaken by the employment department on learning and the world of work had a big impact on the Lifetime Learning consultative document in 1995. They recognised the key transition for society was to develop the 'habit of learning' – and that this was more important than what was learned. Subject areas and vocational divides were not important, indeed the current definition of vocational was too narrow and inhibiting. The skills and attitudes to remain employable in times of change are more important than job-specific skills or subject-area expertise.

Their research also recognised that workers and employers value outcomes from the process of learning as much as the 'harvest outcomes': like self-confidence, sociability, renewed motivation, and so on, and that these are found in the adult education courses which are not formally accredited.

In volume 42 of the Research Series there is a summarising section (p34) under the category 'self-funding learners':

The best single example of self-funded learning is largely excluded by a (narrow) definition of vocational education and training, i.e. those 1.5 million people who are, presently, involved in Adult Education. In many ways, the debate about how 'vocational' should be defined is central to the idea of 'lifetime learning'. A broad definition would include any learning activities which contribute towards an individual's continuing employability, rather than (more narrowly) only those activities which contribute towards the individual's stock of skills or competences. A number of the better known employee learning programmes (Ford and Rover in particular) bias towards this broader definition. In doing so, there is a recognition that:

- *any activities which help the individual into the habit of learning are to be valued, regardless of the specific subject area*
- *other, more general and non-skill or competence based benefits (such as confidence, fulfilment and motivation) accrue from learning and have value in a work context.*

Viewing adult education from this perspective begins to suggest that the sector may have a more significant role to play in a national strategy to inculcate a culture of lifelong learning than has generally been assumed. This is despite the fact that many of the subject areas studied tend to be 'recreational' rather than 'vocational', and that (at least until quite recently) adult education has tended to be an area of significant subsidy by local authorities.

Regarded as a whole, adult education embodies a number of the key characteristics which would be evident in a 'lifetime learning' culture:

- it is a self-motivated and increasingly self-funded area of adult learning (albeit the costs are relatively small)
- it involves adults entering the education system (voluntarily), and being re-introduced to the habit of learning
- it shows the post-16 education and training system operating as a market, with individuals making free choices, and the suppliers responding to demand
- it is increasingly being linked to qualifications.

. . Rather than being seen as a basis on which to build for the future, it tends to be viewed more as a legacy from an age of 'self-improvement' . . .

Research series No 68 brings together the comparative findings from all the earlier surveys. Individuals and employers both cited increased job satisfaction as the most likely outcome of employee training.

Both these actual and perceived outcomes tied up very closely with the factors identified by

individuals as motivating them to participate in the learning process. The value of training was most commonly seen as coming from two sorts of benefits; first, those associated with more 'concrete' matters, such as increased job satisfaction . . . and second, less tangible things such as personal satisfaction, improved confidence and increased sociability.

Non-qualification awarding courses were assessed by the Providers' Attitudes survey . . . providers were asked whether there were 'positive outcomes' to such courses. Over nine out of ten said that there were, citing such things as increased motivation or confidence, through a sense of achievement, enjoyment or socialisation or in terms of improved skills or levels of expertise. (p31)

Among the special features of non-accredited adult education is the diversity of the curriculum and programmes, and of the people involved. Because the scope of courses ranges more widely than 'vocational' (from personal leisure or development to role education, community participation and citizenship; to life-stage and social adaptation, and so on) and reaches students at all stages of adulthood, the range of learning objectives, the application of learning outcomes, the valued 'learning process outcomes' are also more diverse. If lifelong learning is going to be a reality, then 'more will mean different' and adult education will need to be acknowledged and valued as a key sector. The 'vocational only' and the 'accredited only' will not drive learning into a 'resistant' society.

INSPECTORATE FINDINGS

We have examined a small range of providers in this brief survey. The main inspection agencies, OFSTED and the FEFC Inspectorate, cover the full span of providers of adult education between them, and their reports confirm our findings.

By 1995–96, 79% of students in FEFC (England) provision were adults, of which 81% were studying part-time. The Widening Participation committee's guide on quality, 'How to Make Learning Work' (1997), proposes nine indicators of good practice. One indicator acknowledges the importance of identifying and valuing broad learning outcomes:

Mechanisms for recording students' achievements which acknowledge all learning are meaningful to students and are recognised by employers, education providers and others.

In the OFSTED report, 'Adult education and youth work within local education authorities' (reviewing the year 1994–95), the section on Main Findings reported:

- *Opportunities for a variety of progression routes are built into the best adult education programmes. Nevertheless, both adult education and youth services need to give more attention to identifying and recording the outcomes of the whole range of their work and not simply that which is externally accredited or part of a short-term project. (p4)*
- *In the main, adults were achieving an impressive and diverse range of outcomes as a result of their involvement in LEA adult education: men who had never cooked before were turning their hand to complicated recipes; students with learning difficulties had acquired the poise and control to perform an extract from a Shakespeare play; language students used their newly-acquired linguistic competence for their jobs, for their holidays or for communicating with friends and family. Machine knitters, embroiderers, potters and painters produced articles for sale or for exhibition; lace-making or heirloom quilt students developed their skills whilst sustaining traditional crafts. Musicians and actors took the opportunity to demonstrate their newly-developed talents in performance. In family literacy programmes, parents developed the skills and confidence to help their children with their reading and number work, working alongside them as well as extending their own learning in separate provision; students on Basic Skills at Work programmes were rapidly building up their oral and written skills as well as their confidence, whilst employers confirmed that those who had followed such programmes now had the capacity to undertake more complex tasks in the work place. (p6 opus cited)*

The learners recognise it, the providers and employers recognise it, the inspection service recognises: that adult education is as much valued for the outcomes like 'confidence', 'raised motivation', 'flexibility' and so on as for formal learning outcomes and the applications of learning. Furthermore, adult education represents an available gateway to extending participation to Lifelong Learning for the widest range of adults. There is a further bonus for

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those seeking to extend provision to all who can benefit: the bulk of the learning achieves valued outcomes without the additional burden and cost of accreditation. The model for funding such a breakthrough already exists in the way the FEFC funds the WEA and the London designated institutions. Both the Scottish further education system and the proposed Northern Ireland post-incorporation framework have eschewed the Schedule 2/non-Schedule 2 divide.

Conclusion

While this paper has offered some possible frameworks and tools for thinking about adult learning outcomes it is not possible to be narrowly prescriptive about the 'best tool' for collecting evidence. As we have seen, learners, especially perhaps those who are paying their way, do not always see the benefits of collecting evidence of learning outcomes; many small organisations see the need for simple, affordable approaches; some of the bigger stakeholders are taking fright at the cost and burdens of the shift to accreditation/qualifications, at a time when what is needed is a widening of tolerance of different ways of learning, of acceptance of people's own judgements about benefits and learning applications, and a return to making the 'habit of learning' enjoyable.

Organisations will choose approaches which reflect their values, their staffing levels and the tolerances of their students. A widening of tolerance will probably be more effective than a narrow prescriptiveness if we are to accommodate the range of learners and the means of the providers.

Whether adults are learning in FE colleges, voluntary organisations, local authority centres, universities or the workplace, they will gain a greater sense of achievement if their tutors recognise the value of a broader range of learning outcomes.

The findings of this report have beenconfirmed in 'Learning for the 21st century', the report of the National Advisory Committee for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (NAGCELL). The report was published after the completion of this study. It strongly supports that 'lifelong learning should be for all aspects of life and meet a variety of needs and objectives' and urges that 'Government, other funders and providers should seek to cherish equally those many forms of learning which can clearly demonstrate high quality, achievement for learners and added value.'

It explicitly recommends that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority should give a lead in the development of a national system of recording and signalling learning activity and achievement. It supports the development of a national, widely used Record of Achievement, or a 'progress file' such as that recommended by the Dearing Inquiry into Higher Education and currently being trialled in further and adult education. It concludes that, properly organised and widely recognised, the use of such a method of recording learning would contribute to learners' own sense of ownership and management of their own learning, engaging them in monitoring and reviewing their own progress throughout life.

Footnotes

1 cf the University of Cambridge Board of Continuing Education definition of a learning outcome as 'something that a person would be expected to know, or to understand, or be able to do as a result of a course or other learning experience.'

There is still debate as to the link between 'knowing' and 'understanding'. Many would argue that unless you understand you do not really know.

Appendices

Appendix 1

1 In essence, the FEFC's duty as laid out in Schedule 2 (S2) to the Act extends to:

- qualification-bearing vocationally-oriented courses
- academic programmes leading to GCE A-level, A/S-levels and GCSE qualifications
- certificated programmes preparing students for further, more focused study in further and higher education
- adult literacy and numeracy provision (usually referred to collectively as 'adult basic education', or ABE)
- courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- certain provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD), where that provision develops communication and/or independent living skills and leads to student progression.

2 A local authority's duty is one which is defined by exception, and covers courses and other learning opportunities commonly referred to as 'non-Schedule 2' (NS2) provision. Traditionally this has been regarded as relating to a range of 'non-vocational adult education' programmes, categorised in Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) statistical returns as:

- creative leisure and hobby pursuits (primarily arts and crafts, like painting and music)
- 'practical' programmes, including certain domestic craft disciplines (such as basic computing, flower arranging, cake icing)
- physical activities (like yoga, keep fit, dance)
- foreign languages for non-business purposes (such as French for holiday-makers, introductory Italian)
- general interest courses (such as local history, art appreciation, literature).

Since implementation of the Further and Higher Education Act, however, the concept of 'non-Schedule 2' has been extended to include:

- non-certificated vocational and academic courses, such as those designed to provide a 'taster' for a longer period of qualification-focused study
- certain aspects of 'access' work – return-to-learn courses – which fail to satisfy criteria laid down by the FEFC
- 'role' education designed to assist people in their life roles (such as parenting, pre-retirement) or in execution of non-work-related responsibilities (such as school governor training, organisation of community groups)
- certain aspects of provision for people with learning difficulties where courses and programmes fall outside the FEFC criteria, including provision which does not prepare people for further study, or which leads directly into employment (open or sheltered)
- other unaccredited courses, including those which provide opportunities for personal development.

It should also be noted that any change to interpretation of Schedule 2, whether resulting from FEFC interpretation (such as a review of ABE and ESOL qualifications now underway) or from proposals by the Secretary of State (such as the DfEE consultation on criteria for approval of vocational qualifications), will automatically impact upon the extent of a local authority's statutory duty.

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APPENDIX 2

Following the colloquium at which papers on learning outcomes were presented by designated colleges and others, a working party met to clarify the next steps. Desk research was undertaken to investigate different concepts of learning outcomes and related issues such as the accreditation of adult learning.

Two conferences were held to share understanding of the benefits and problems associated with outcomes-based approaches with a wide image of adult educators. One was at Fircroft College, Birmingham, the other at FEDA's residential centre in Blagdon. The membership included 15 college participants, 19 from adult and community education or LEAs, five from higher education and a designated institution. The report builds on these consultations and includes case studies of different approaches.

APPENDIX 3

Membership of FEDA colloquium and consultative group

- Maureen Banbury, HMI Inspectorate
- Sue Cara, Norfolk Adult Education Service (and NIACE)
- Carolyn Daines, WEA Eastern Region
- Joyce Deere, Hillcroft College
- Mel Doyle, WEA National Officer
- Pablo Foster, FEDA
- Robert Fryer, Northern College
- Ursula Howard, FEDA
- Olga Janssen, Mary Ward Centre
- Caroline Mager, FEDA
- Evelyn Murray, Working Men's College
- Joan O'Hagan, Fircroft College
- Christopher Parkin, FEDA
- Anna Reisenberger, FEDA
- Gary Smith, Northern College
- Sheila Stanley, Hillcroft College
- Merillie Vaughan Huxley, Senior Inspector, FEFC
- Ansel Wong, Morley College
- Stephen Yeo, Ruskin College

APPENDIX 4

The specification of learning outcomes
Further Education Development Agency

Summary of Christopher Parkin's Paper

1 Learning outcomes describe what a person knows, understands and is able to do after a process of learning. Making outcomes explicit can help both learner and tutor to understand what the learner is trying to achieve, to monitor achievement, and to decide what learning methods and activities may be most appropriate.

2 A variety of terms are in use to describe more or less specific learning outcomes.

3 It is recommended that three categories of learning outcome should be recognised and that these should be called general learning outcomes, specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

4 In stating the learning outcomes of a Unit of Achievement or module of a curriculum, a number of possible alternative combinations of these categories is possible. It is recommended that a style is adopted which comprises normally, one general learning outcome, several more specific outcomes and further assessment criteria.

An initial general learning outcome is a useful summary description of what should be or has been achieved and gives a ready sense of direction. More Specific Learning Outcomes then describe what should be achieved, but excluding conditions and standards of the achievement. Assessment Criteria define achievement more specifically and enable judgements to be made more easily as to whether or not the learning outcomes have been achieved.

5 Note: A Framework for Credit, Framework Guidelines (FEU 1995) takes forward this advice by equating a General Learning Outcome with a Unit Title referring to Specific Learning Outcomes as Learning Outcomes and adopting the category Assessment Criteria.

6 The above framework can be applied to all learning provision. To what extent is it applicable for describing learning and achievement by all adult students? Certainly many Access courses and much Open College Network provision specify both learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

7 Level is determined by the:

- choice of verbs used in the outcome statements
- choice of content, i.e. the structure and learning demands of the chosen
- knowledge, skill and attitudes which accompany those verbs, and the choice of qualitative and quantitative phrases which qualify the verbs.

8 Learning outcomes statements alone are not sufficient to express a curriculum. In addition, description of valued teaching and learning activities and examples of assessment requirements, where appropriate, facilitate consistency and effectiveness in communicating what is to be achieved.

Figure 8: Terms used in specifying learning outcomes

NORTHERN COLLEGE
PATHWAYS PROGRAMME
STUDENT LEARNING DIARY

STUDENT NAME: .....

COURSE TITLE: .....

DATE OF COURSE: .....

To help you keep a record of what you learn during your Northern College short course we have produced this learning diary.

If you wish to obtain credit for your course your learning diary will be collected from you at the end of the course and used as evidence of your achievement. The tutors will assist you to fill in the diary .

Section 1

To be filled in at the Course Introduction.

(a) Is there anything you have done previously which might be relevant to this course?

In the community?

In your voluntary group or trade union?

At work?

At home?

(b) Have you previously read or heard anything about the subject of this course? (Tick the appropriate box)

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, where did you read or hear about the subject? (e.g. TV, radio, book, newspaper, magazine, meetings, talking to friends.)

Can you give an example of what you read or heard?

(c) Have you previously taken any courses on the same or relevant subject? (Tick the appropriate box)

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, which course(s) and where?

Can you give an example of something which you learned on the previous course?

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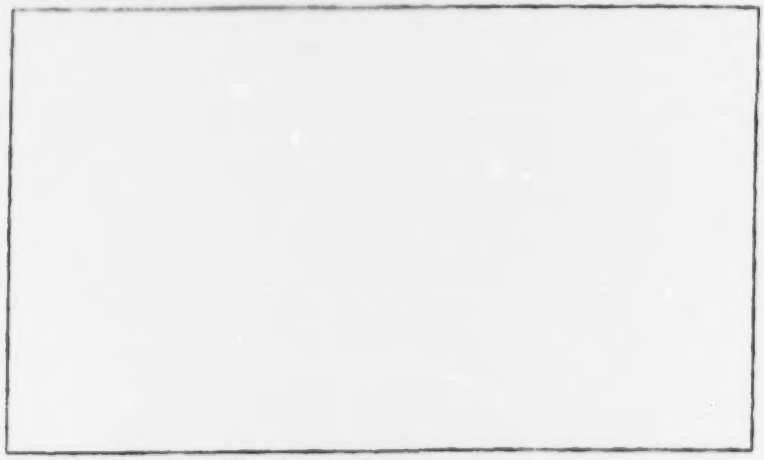
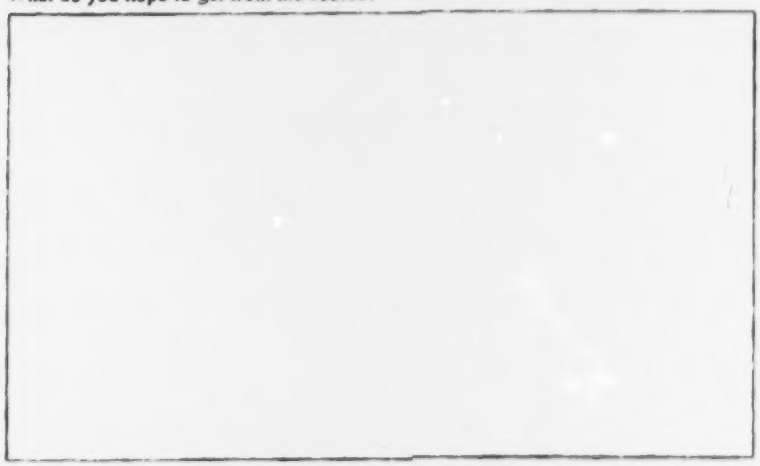
(d) Is there anything else which you want to mention which is relevant to this course?



(e) What do you hope to get from the course?



Section 2

We suggest that you briefly note down what you have learnt at the end of each session. The tutor will assist you to do this, but we have given you some suggestions for things to think about at the end of each session.

End Session 1

(a) Can you give any examples of new information you have been given during the session?

(b) Can you give any examples of skills you have learnt or developed during the session? (e.g. reading, note taking, writing, using the Library, using a computer, using numbers, public speaking.)

(c) If the session has made clearer or changed your view on a topic, can you give an example?

(d) Is there anything else which you have learnt from this session?

Section 3

To be filled in at the end of course.

(a) Can you give any examples of how you might use what you have learnt on this course?

In the community?

In your voluntary group or trade union?

At work?

At home?

(b) Do you propose to continue your learning after this course?
(Tick the appropriate box)

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what more would you like to learn?

(c) How might you continue your learning?
(Tick those boxes which you will explore)

- Check out courses at my local College ☐
- Contact the Workers Educational Association ☐
- Organise a study group at my local community centre ☐
- Enquire with my trade union on possible courses ☐
- Contact the Open University ☐
- Come back to Northern College to take another course ☐
- Check out course information at the local Library/local press ☐
- Contact my Training and Enterprise Council for information on courses ☐
- Ask my employer about possible training and education ☐

Any other ideas?
(Please write them down)

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(d) Have you been working in small groups whilst doing the course?
(Tick the appropriate box)

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, have you learnt anything about yourself from working in small groups?

Have you learnt anything about other people from working in small groups?

(e) Have you been staying overnight in the College whilst on the course?
(Tick the appropriate box)

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, has staying overnight helped you to learn more on the course?
(Tick the appropriate box)

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how has staying in the College helped you to learn more?

(f) Are there any key points which you want to note down for action after you leave the College?

Section 4

Have you any additional comments or notes?
(Please write them down)

LJ/H:Comdocs\LmDiary

WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION EASTERN DISTRICT

Description of Learning and Course Evaluation

You are invited to use this form to help you to reflect on what you have learned from your course. Your responses will also help your tutor to make future courses more effective and enjoyable and will assist the WEA in ensuring that it is providing courses which really do promote adult learning.

Your Name (if you wish to give it): _____

Tutor's Name: _____ **Branch:** _____ **Term:** _____

Course Title: _____

(A) Learning Outcomes: Please tick the column which expresses the progress you think you have made towards achieving the learning outcomes agreed with your tutor at the start of the course.

	I think I can do this [✓]	I am working towards this [✓]	I cannot do this [✓]
1. Identify the main reasons for change in the last 50 years			
2. Classify the changes in terms of their economic, social and political origins			
3. Assess the changes with reference to local, national and global events			
4. Judge the consequences of the changes in both the short and medium term			

(B) What else did you gain from the course?

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(C) **What next?** What has the course helped you to go on to (another similar course, a course on another subject, a more advanced course, membership of a society, voluntary or paid work, private study/research, creative work, etc)?

(D) **Course Evaluation:** Comment on any aspects of the course, how it was taught, the materials used, the arrangements and accommodation. Your tutor and the WEA will value your criticisms and suggestions.

If you would like this form returned to you for your own records by the District Office, please write your name and address here.

WEA

Course Code.....Title.....

Student's No.....Student's Name.....

OFFICE USE		
1		
2		
3		
T		
A		
	Y	N

At the start of the course

Agree with your tutor a minimum of one and a maximum of three learning objectives.
Please enter these in order of importance in the boxes below.

Your most important learning objective

Your second most important learning objective

Your third most important learning objective

At the end of the course

How far have you achieved your objectives?
Use only the following scores:

1 I have not achieved this objective
2 I have not quite achieved this objective
3 Broadly speaking I have achieved this objective
4 I have achieved more than I anticipated
5 I have achieved much more than I anticipated

Write in your score

Your first objective

Your second objective

Your third objective

Tutor's comment:

Student's signature.....Tutor's signature.....

Mary Ward Centre

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WORKING MEN'S COLLEGE for men & women

1996/97 Course Review Forms

To be completed by the College

Course Title: _____ Course No: _____

Tutor: _____

No. Enrolled: ☐ No. Completing: ☐ Average Attendance: ☐

Exam Results: (where applicable) _____

To be completed by the Tutor

a) Referring back to the aims and objectives you gave for this course, what proportion of students do you consider have:

i) Largely achieved the course objectives: ☐

ii) Partially achieved the course objectives: ☐

iii) Achieved few or none of the course objectives: ☐

b) What proportion of the content given in your units of work has been covered in the course:

100%	☐	50-100%	☐
75-100%	☐	less than 50%	☐

c) What methods have you used to assess and record your students' progress?

d) Do you have any further observations on the progress of this course?

Please complete and return this form, no later than 30 May 1997, to:
Lee Barr, Working Men's College, 44 Crowndale Road, London, NW1 1TR

Working Men's College

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FE

Learning is central to economic productivity in the information and communications age. This book is about the accreditation of learning in its widest sense, not as part of the framework of formal qualifications. The sense of achievement which successful learning offers can come from a variety of sources. This book illustrates how learning can be identified, recorded and valued in a way which starts with learners' needs. Learners need to take away a knowledge and recognition of their own achievements: new skills or personal development.

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